DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 493 HE 031 942

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TITLE Planning Imperatives for the Next Century. IHE Perspectives.
INSTITUTION Georgia Univ., Athens. Inst. of Higher Education.
PUB DATE 1999-01-00
NOTE 8p.
AVAILABLE FROM Institute of Higher Education, Candler Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-1772; Tel: 706-542-3464; Fax: 706-542-7588; Web site: http://service.uga.edu/ihe/
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Administration; *College Planning; Decision Making; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Planning; Educational Policy; Educational Principles; Educational Trends; Futures (of Society); *Higher Education; Strategic Planning

ABSTRACT

This essay reviews 10 imperatives for higher education planning that are needed to meet the challenges of the next century. It is argued that higher education leaders must: (1) reaffirm the development of the human mind and character as education's major goal; (2) accept responsibility for educating and developing institutional leaders; (3) apply organizational know-how and technological competence to the problems of education; (4) recognize and complete the business of the twentieth century, including equal access for all and improvement of undergraduate instruction; (5) develop and use more effective concepts and methods of policy planning and decision making; (6) clarify the purposes, values, and public expectations of higher education in an increasingly pluralistic and multinational society; (7) use more effectively the knowledge and experience already available; (8) use more effectively the problem-solving resources and capabilities routinely applied in basic and applied research; (9) define the alternatives and options that are open today but which may be closed five years hence; and (10) learn to think, write, and speak in plain English. (Contains 14 references.) (MDM)

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IHE PERSPECTIVES JANUARY 1999

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PLANNING IMPERATIVES FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

by Cameron Fincher

In higher education the history of systematic planning is checkered. In the 1960s many states developed master plans for the location of new institutions, conducted role and scope studies for new programs, and encouraged institutional planning studies based on enrollment projections and other indices of growth and expansion.

In the 1970s statewide goals and objectives were defined, institutional missions were reviewed, and needs assessment studies were promoted as a means of coping with financial stringency, dwindling resources, and projected declines in student enrollments. Strategic planning was advocated as a way of ensuring institutional survival, competing more successfully in a hostile environment, and regaining institutional vitality. Lacking in many state efforts, however, were: (1) an adequate conceptual framework for planning, (2) stated goals and priorities, (3) efficient management information systems, and (4) planning models that permitted the evaluation of alternative plans.

As the decade of the 1980s closed, there was an intense concern with planning for institutional effectiveness. Public demands for accountability emphasized the assessment of educational outcomes, and accrediting agencies sought evidence of planning methods and procedures that would lead to institutional improvement. Policy studies addressed state laws, court decisions, governing board regulations, and institutional practices that affect institutional performance in the absence of clearly defined missions, goals, and objectives.

In the 1990s statewide planning for higher education focused more sharply on institutional purposes and policies—and on the social, political, economic, and technological context in which planning for institutional effectiveness must take place. Inferring that state initiatives of the past are unlikely to suffice in the future, and different strategies for the continued development of higher education will be needed—several imperatives for planning are readily identified:

1. *Re-affirm "the development of human minds and character" as education's major commitment to the economic development and cultural advancement of state and society.*

In an age of international competition education is increasingly regarded as a public resource that should strengthen the nation's "competitive advantages." Universities are asked to perfect new products, processes, and technologies that will sustain the nation's leadership in a global economy. For the sake of international competition, institutions of higher education are urged by numerous commissions and boards to cooperate with corporate business and state government in developing a more competent workforce. *Business Week* (September 1988), in a special report, said it best: Our ability to compete is threatened by our inadequate investment in people; too many workers do not have the skills needed in more demanding jobs!

Thus, it becomes imperative for institutions of higher education to re-affirm their commitments to the education, training, and development of human talents, abilities, and competencies. A high priority must be assigned the basic skills of literacy while maintaining

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a sharp focus on the development of higher level skills and competencies. The development of intellectual competence (cognitive abilities) should receive the highest possible priority in all university and college efforts to achieve national objectives in international arenas. Institutions of higher education should contribute: *first*, through programs of instruction; *second*, through programs of basic and applied research; and *third*, through programs of consultative and technical services.

2. *Accept responsibility for educating and developing the institutional leaders needed for continued progress and improvement.*

No need in higher education is more pressing than our need for leadership. The contemporary university is in the absurd position of educating leaders for other social institutions while ignoring its own needs and preferences. A career ladder of promotion-through-the-ranks (from department head to dean to vice president) is dimly perceived in presidential demographics but early avowal of presidential aspirations is still anathema on many college campuses. Administrative duties in one of society's most complex institutions are still perceived as: (1) unworthy of true scholars, (2) within the grasp of any Ph.D. who will take the time to observe others, (3) the swiftest way to rise to one's level of incompetence, or (4) a profession to which only a gifted few are called.

And yet, the selection and appointment of key administrators are often based on faulty suppositions concerning personal qualifications, professional experience, faculty expectations, and situational demands. Unrecognized on many campuses is an urgent need for better programs of inservice development and opportunities for personal renewal and continued professional growth. A national need for more effective leadership at all levels of education is, in many respects, the most persistent challenge confronting higher education in the years ahead.

3. *Apply the organizational know-how and technological competence we have to the organizational and technological problems of education.*

It is obvious to many of us that if American higher education is to meet its many challenges of the next century, many constructive changes will be needed. It is imperative, therefore, that institutions of higher learning study themselves in ways that they study other organizations and institutions in contemporary society. We should lay to rest the old saw that modern universities conduct research on every conceivable subject *except* themselves. The methods of inquiry, analysis, and verification that have proven so effective in academic disciplines and specialized fields of study must be used, with better results, on the organizational structures and functions of education (at all levels).

No need in higher education is more pressing than our need for leadership.

The various and sometimes illogical ways in which we organize educational institutions, programs, and services must be investigated with the same objectivity and thoroughness that we study problems and issues within our respective academic disciplines. We should be willing to subject our research to the ground rules of scholarship that dominate our professional and technical journals. More important, we should be able and willing to make policy recommendations that follow from our published findings and conclusions. Among the many issues, problems, and concerns requiring continued attention are:

(1) The governance of educational institutions by lay boards. The scope and complexity of educational institutions now dictate that other possibilities be considered. Too many members of our governing boards are appointed for non-educational purposes, bring no special wisdom or maturity to their tasks, and make no meaningful distinctions between administrative and policy decisions.

(2) Education's continuing allegiance to notions of schools and colleges as physical facilities confined to a campus. The term "invisible college" has often been used to describe intellectual societies that are not located on campuses. In the future more and more teaching and learning will take place in colleges that are invisible to those seeking instruction in ivy-covered buildings.

(3) The effectiveness of traditional forms of academic organization. No contemporary university is logically and consistently organized according to explicit organizational principles. And no organizational chart reveals the mission of its institution or the scope and complexity of its programs and services.

4. *Recognize and complete the unfinished business of the 20th century.*

All colleges and universities should be aware of the many challenges yet to be met. Access and opportunity for minorities, women, and others such as the economically disadvantaged are commitments that have not been fully realized. The improvement of undergraduate instruction and/or the reform of undergraduate education is a strenuous challenge for many institutions—especially for universities where graduate and professional education are dominant. The assessment of educational outcomes (and its concomitant demands for program evaluation) is a challenge that few institutions are meeting well. And needless to add (at this point), planning for institutional effectiveness is a major unfinished task for many colleges and universities. To define institutional purposes and to evaluate institutional performance in meeting those purposes, then to use that knowledge and experience in institutional improvement is a poorly attended item on virtually all college and university agendas.

5. *Develop and use more effective concepts and methods of policy planning and decision making.*

In state-level, institutional, and program planning the greatest need of colleges and universities is informed public policy. Planning decisions and choices should be guided by explicit public policies that encourage systematic, objective, and realistic planning for institutional effectiveness. In turn, statewide planning should address policy issues and concerns, give guidance and direction to the formation of institutional policy, and give substance and meaning to policy decisions affecting the continued development of higher education. All policy planning efforts thus should have the benefit of historical and comparative perspectives that constructively channel institutional policy decisions.

Planning decisions and choices should be guided by explicit public policies that encourage systematic, objective, and realistic planning for institutional effectiveness.

Because all institutions of higher learning are public resources, statewide needs and public expectations are highly relevant factors in policy planning and decisions. In particular, statewide planning should be sensitive to the differentiated missions of colleges and universities, their respective resources and capabilities, and the constituencies they serve. At the same time, institutions must be given incentives to plan and they should be recognized or otherwise rewarded for effective planning. And whenever possible—institutions of higher education should develop their own planning methods and models.

6. *Clarify the purposes, values, and public expectations of higher education in an increasingly pluralistic and multinational society.*

In their concern for survival and their competitiveness, many institutions lose sight of their original purpose—teaching and

learning. Public resources are committed for the explicit purpose of educating, developing, and training responsible and productive citizens of state and society. All institutions of postsecondary education now have (at least) a five-fold mission of: (1) general education, (2) personal development, (3) access and transfer, (4) career-related programs, and (5) public or community service. Thus, the discovery and development of human talent, the continued development of individual differences, and the improvement of personal effectiveness, interpersonal competence, and economic productivity are frequently identified as educational purposes—and as a basic reason for public support. Instruction in the basic skills of literacy, guidance and direction in the development of basic academic competencies, assistance in mastering advanced learning skills, and continuing adult or professional education are increasingly recognized as institutional functions and responsibilities. The most important purpose and function of education, however, continues to be the intellectual competence of individual students and reinforcement of their efforts to learn how-to-learn and to continue learning throughout their adult years.

7. *Use more effectively the knowledge, experience, and technological know-how that we already have.*

Institutions of higher education have many planning, decision-making, and problem-solving resources and capabilities that are relevant to the policy issues and decisions of the 21st century. In the past planning commissions and committees have been under compulsion to gather more data than they can possibly assimilate. Within the policy arenas of higher education there is copious knowledge and information that is seldom used for policy decisions: regional, state, and institutional fact books or information digests, etc.

Also available for use in policy planning and decisions are remarkable photocopying, computational, and communication equipment which we have not mastered. More important to the effectiveness of institutional and program planning, however, is the professional experience of administrators, faculty members, and professional staff members who have worked on previous self-studies, planning committees, review committees, and funded projects related to institutional effectiveness. In the future, as in the past, neither statewide, institutional nor program planning should proceed on the assumption that ignorance of past mistakes is a benefit.

8. *Use more effectively the problem-solving resources and capabilities we apply routinely in basic and applied research.*

This imperative is a corollary of the previous, but its importance merits separate attention. Research (and land grant) universities have an enviable record in the application of research methods to public policy issues and societal problems. Contemporary universities thus have much to offer in the way of research and development capabilities, planning and management talent, and technological innovation and transfer. They have much to contribute to policy analysis and interpretation, to public policy decisions, to societal problem-solving, and to public consensus on crucial policy choices. The formation of "partnerships" with state government, corporate business, and public corporations is indicative of the changing role (and responsibilities) of universities in public policy making and societal problem solving.

9. *Define the alternatives and options that are still open in the years 1999-2001 but which may be closed five years later.*

There is much about the 21st century that is highly probable but little that is inevitable. If the years 1999-2001 are correctly viewed as a bridge to "a new millennium," it is imperative to identify the alternative routes that can be taken. Similar attention and effort should be given to options that should remain open. To

oversimplify, the decade of the 1990s did not permit the creation or discovery of new alternatives as much as it demanded intelligent choice of alternatives that were already in the making. The crucial question then becomes *which*?—not *what*, *when*, and *where*!

As the 1990s close, colleges and universities are faced with numerous unexpected and exciting alternatives, options, and choices. Instead of "invisible colleges" there are increasing references to "virtual universities" that can generate student-credit-hours more profitably than traditional classrooms with one instructor and twenty students. If, like business corporations, universities choose to maximize their profitability, it will surely be at the expense of traditional methods of ensuring excellence and assuring quality. In a more complex future, the hasty choice of certain alternatives will indeed close out certain options. And in most efforts to keep options open, the crucial question would seem to be *how*?

In brief, if policy planning and decision making is not to be *ad hoc*, expedient, or politically opportunistic, alternatives must be defined and deliberately chosen—whenever possible. The bane of many planning efforts in higher education has long been campus politics, boosterism and petty egos.

10. And to round out our decalogue of imperatives: Learn to think, write, and speak in plain English!

A common language remains one of education's urgent needs. Educationese is totally unforgivable—and planning jargon, borrowed without benefit of critical thought, is a major barrier to effective communication among those who would discuss intelligently the purposes of education in a literate society.

One extreme can be found in the cliches of strategic planning and the arcanery of computer modeling as a disservice to academic colleagues who teach, research, and serve well without translations from the language of planning. Another extreme is seen in the "literary analyses" of education that contain excessive postmodernistic verbiage. Education is indeed a matter of human purpose and experience—but it should never be demeaned as a "social construction," a mere "myth," or a "conspiracy of entrenched power."

And yet another extreme is always latent whenever planning is discussed in academic councils. This is the fatalistic attitude that planning is a needless waste of institutional resources that could be expended for better purposes—more often than not, in the very department where the speaker or writer holds tenure. Such attitudes are often expressed with wit, charm, and great skepticism but they are fatalistic nonetheless.

In a more complex future, the hasty choice of certain alternatives will indeed close out certain options.

IN SUMMARY: the challenges to higher education—in the next century, as in the past—deserve the best thought and discussion that can be brought to bear upon one of the nation's finest accomplishments since World War II. Although no "invisible college or think-tank" has designed a national system of higher education, a national system is in place and serves its constitutencies well. In similar manner, there are at least fifty state-level systems where the primary responsibility for higher education continues to reside.

Irrespective of the innovative planning principles and methods devised for the next century (or decade), systemic planning will be needed in higher education and the primary responsibility for such planning must be accepted by the leadership of our separate states. Both national and state leadership will be essential to the effectiveness of public planning policy and development. In turn, the effectiveness of academic leaders in reaffirming institutional commitments and in reordering institutional and program priorities is directly related to the effectiveness of policy planning, decisions, and choice.

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THIS ISSUE . . .

This issue of IHE PERSPECTIVES has been adapted from a series of papers presented at an invitational seminar, November 21-22, 1989, and published as PLANNING IMPERATIVES FOR THE 1990S. A paperback monograph including all nine papers is available from the Institute of Higher Education for $3.00 prepaid (to cover cost of postage and handling).

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